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Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

8028th meeting
Tuesday, 22 August 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Aboulatta	(Egypt)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Ms. Schoulgin-Nyoni
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Jenča.

Mr. Jenča: I thank the Security Council for this opportunity to brief it on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

As detailed last month by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov (see S/PV.8011), the recent crisis in Jerusalem once again highlighted the unsustainable nature of the current situation and the need for a political horizon and a clear recommitment by the international community and both parties to ending the occupation and to realizing a two-State solution that meets the legitimate national aspirations and security needs of both Palestinians and Israelis.

Following the deadly 14 July attack in which two policemen were killed by three assailants in the Old City, three Israelis were stabbed to death in a terror attack and six Palestinians were killed during primarily peaceful protests, as a result of live ammunition, which raises concerns about the use of force by Israeli security forces. I join the Secretary-General in commending the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, in line with the latter's special and historic role, for bringing that crisis to a conclusion. I also note positively the calls for de-escalation by prominent religious leaders on both sides. We encourage continued discussion among all parties concerned to ensure the safety and security of all worshippers and visitors while upholding the historic status quo in the holy sites. In that context, continued security coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is paramount, and the official resumption of contact between the parties is vital.

In other incidents in recent weeks, two Palestinians were killed and more than 150 injured were by Israeli security forces. Four Israelis were injured by Palestinians, including one civilian. On 28 July, a Palestinian man was shot dead by Israeli security forces for reportedly attempting to stab a soldier at the Gush Etzion Junction of the West Bank. On 2 August, an Israeli civilian was seriously wounded during a stabbing attack by a Palestinian in the Israeli town of Yavneh. On 8 August, militants in Gaza fired a rocket that landed in an open area in southern Israel. The following day, the Israeli Air Force retaliated with missile fire at two Hamas installations in Gaza, injuring three people. On 17 August, an alleged suicide bombing killed one and injured five others in the southern Gaza strip.

Over the past month, developments occurred that further undermined trust between the parties. On 26 July, the Israeli Knesset approved the first reading of an amendment to the Basic Law: Jerusalem, Capital of Israel. If approved, that law would further cement Israeli control of occupied East Jerusalem and would limit the ability of both sides to reach a negotiated solution that is in line with General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and prior agreements. Jerusalem is the final status issue that must be resolved through negotiations between the parties. Any move that could have an impact on demographics in the city is extremely worrisome and could spark violence.

On 25 July, 15 Israeli settler families illegally occupied the so-called Machpela House, in the divided city of Hebron, despite an ongoing Israeli legal process regarding ownership of the House. We urge Israeli authorities to resolve the situation quickly to avoid further tensions in that already highly charged town. Settlers reportedly also placed mobile homes near the settlement of Halamish in response to last month's deadly attack there, as well as within the Shvut Rachel neighbourhood of the Shilo settlement. On 3 August, the Israeli Prime Minister delivered an inaugural speech at the launch of the construction of 1,000 new housing units in the Beitar Ilit settlement. In the speech, he praised the achievement of his Government in promoting settlements. Such actions only fuel perceptions that those working to obstruct the two-State solution are gaining the upper hand. I must reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace.

In a few days' time, we will mark the third anniversary of the ceasefire that ended the most recent

round of hostilities between Hamas and Israel in the Gaza Strip in 2014, in which close to 1,500 civilians were killed. Since then, the overall humanitarian conditions in Gaza have worsened. That was clearly documented in a recent United Nations country team report that looked at the state of Gaza's population since Hamas' takeover of the Strip in 2007, thereby increasing concerns that the Strip could become unlivable by 2020. The punishing measures taken against Gaza by the Palestinian Authority since April only add to the crippling humanitarian effect of Israel's closures on the population. Whatever the political differences between the Palestinian factions, it is not the people of Gaza who should pay the price.

Despite reconstruction efforts over the past three years, approximately 29,000 people remain displaced, while living in temporary shelters and in poor conditions. Completing our collective reconstruction effort in Gaza is within sight, but Member States need to fulfil their funding commitments. The Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, established by Israel and the Palestinian Authority with support from the United Nations in the aftermath of the conflict, has enabled much of the reconstruction. I encourage Israel and the Palestinian Authority to intensify their engagement towards improving the Mechanism to reach its full potential. It is also time for the parties to discuss the future of that provisional instrument with the goal of fully lifting all closures.

Despite the import of fuel from Egypt to run the Gaza power plant, most residents are experiencing the sweltering summer heat with only four to five hours of electricity per day. The impact of the ongoing energy crisis is far-reaching, while affecting the availability of clean water, health care and sanitation services. The United Nations continues to provide a lifeline through its provision of emergency fuel in support of a number of critical facilities. I call on Palestinian leaders to address the destructive consequences of the divisions. I encourage them to reach an agreement that would allow the legitimate Palestinian authorities to take up their responsibilities in Gaza, as a step towards the formation of a united and democratically elected Palestinian Government based on the principles of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Hamas must also ensure that calm is maintained by stopping the militant build-up against Israel and by doing its utmost to sustain security at the border with Egypt. Israel should step-up measures to lift the closures and facilitate development in Gaza as overall calm persists in the Strip in line with resolution 1860 (2009). I also call on donors to respond urgently to the $25 million humanitarian appeal made in July in the wake of the electricity crisis so as to fill the current 70 per cent funding gap.

Briefly with regard to Lebanon, the situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has generally remained quiet. On 31 July, Major General Beary chaired a tripartite meeting with the parties, during which both sides discussed violations of resolution 1701 (2006), Blue Line marking and ongoing liaison and coordination matters. UNIFIL protested the presence of unauthorized weapons and uniformed personnel in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) during a commemoration of the 2006 war, organized by Hizbullah on 13 August. Military operations against militants continue on the eastern border with Syria. As a result of local deals, a number of militants and refugees were evacuated from the area of Arsal to areas in Syria. Support for the Lebanese Armed Forces and other security institutions of the State as the sole protectors of the security and stability of Lebanon remains important.

In the Syrian Golan, the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic has been maintained, albeit in a volatile environment attributable to the ongoing conflict in Syria. Both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic have stated their continued commitment to the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces and support for the full return of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force to the area of separation, conditions permitting.

With regard once again to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, last month's crisis in the Old City of Jerusalem, which is home to sites holy to all three monotheistic religions, demonstrated that tensions can ignite, thereby threatening to transform the nature of the conflict and spread across borders. It is therefore essential that international and regional partners remain engaged in ending the occupation and resolving all final-status issues, in upholding and implementing the vision of two States living side-by-side in peace and security based of all the relevant United Nations resolutions and in supporting both Israeli and Palestinian leaders to take the necessary steps towards ensuring an enduring peace.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Jenča for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Miroslav Jenča for his briefing.

The position of Uruguay with regard to the conflict between Israel and Palestine and, even more important, on how to reach an agreement that will end it, is well known, and I will therefore be very brief. Nevertheless, we must not forego such opportunities to encourage both parties in the search for peace. I will limit my comments today to several recent developments that have an impact on the peace process, and possible courses of action for the future.

Uruguay is concerned about the lack of progress in connection with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, with its humanitarian, political and security implications in both countries and throughout the region. Unfortunately, over the past several months there have been no major developments with regard to the peace process. We were hoping to see a quickened pace of action and more substantial outcomes following the release of the Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex) and the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), but that has not been the case.

The parties have not thus far taken any measure to reverse the trends that threaten the two-State solution, despite the valuable recommendations contained in the Quartet's report, published more than a year ago. We look forward to the presentation, next September, of the third quarterly report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) by Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov. Although we do not expect major changes with respect to his briefing made during the open debate last June (see S/PV.7977), we reiterate our interest that it be circulated in writing prior to next month's meeting so that we will be able to analyse the information provided to us and to provide our impressions following a very careful reading of the document.

A month ago (see S/PV.8011), we expressed our condemnation and concern with regard to the escalation in violence following the terrorist attack on the esplanade of the mosques in Jerusalem. Fortunately, some hours afterwards, the Government of Israel left unimplemented the new security measures that the Palestinian side viewed as having an impact on the status quo of the holy sites. As a result, it was possible to reduce exponentially the violence that had been afflicting the Palestinian territories for more than 10 days. In that regard, we ask the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities to make every effort to avoid unnecessary provocations that increase tension and violence and that compromise the efforts made by the international community to try to restart the bilateral peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine with a view to achieving the two-State solution.

With regard to Gaza, the situation that has been eclipsed in the Security Council by the many other humanitarian disasters facing the region, we remain concerned about the serious crisis being suffered by the population due to a cumulative process over many years marked by the consequences of armed conflicts and the negligence of regional authorities. The 2 million Palestinians who reside in Gaza and are subsisting in very hard conditions — for example, the electricity crisis in the area — also face the possibility of a new conflict that may result in a humanitarian disaster and that may foster extremism in the whole region. We therefore urgently call on the Palestinian and the Israeli authorities, as well as the leaders of Hamas, to find a solution to the various problems that threaten to plunge Gaza into a downward spiral.

In conclusion, as we have done since 1947, we reiterate the unwavering commitment of Uruguay to peace in the Middle East and are concerned by the long-standing paralysis of the process. In order to achieve that long-awaited objective, the accomplishment of the two-State solution, the parties must resume direct bilateral negotiations. That is the only option that would allow for the peaceful coexistence of Israel and Palestine and the welfare and safety of their peoples. The international community continues to clamour for a politically negotiated settlement, which is the only way out of this endless and dark tunnel. All mediation and facilitation efforts on the part of Council members are welcome. We ask once again that the voice of the international community be heard and that we be allowed to help. It should not be forgotten that in the coexistence between States there is no asset more valuable than peace. The potential for future cooperation and development remains intact. Be an example. Be pioneers and courageously negotiate peace, bringing stability to the afflicted region of the Middle East.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, Bolivia wishes to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Miroslav Jenča, for his briefing this morning. Bolivia is attending this meeting to make

known its concern regarding the latest developments in the occupied Palestinian territories.

We are concerned about the information circulated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs that on the morning of 21 August Israel demolished a nursery in the Bedouin community of Jabal al-Baba, in the occupied territory of the West Bank. We wish to make known our deep rejection of this type of unilateral action taken by the Government of Israel, as such are violations of international law, human rights and international humanitarian law. As expressed by the Council in resolution 242 (1967), of 22 November 1967, the fulfilment of Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, which should include, among other things, the termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.

For Bolivia, the solution by which two States would live side by side, with secure borders recognized by both, is the only alternative that, based on dialogue, will allow Palestine to achieve its full development in all spheres — political, social, economic and cultural. In that regard, we join in and commend all efforts aimed at reaching a peaceful settlement of the conflict between Palestine and Israel, such as the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and others, and at ensuring a just and lasting peace for both peoples. We reaffirm our full commitment to multilateralism and debate framed in respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States.

However, it is essential that efforts to resolve the conflict between Israel and Palestine continue to be a matter of priority to be addressed by the Security Council, with the understanding that it is our responsibility to be the guarantor of international peace and security and to take timely action to safeguard the integrity of both peoples. We should not allow ourselves to be immersed in delaying tactics that are used by the occupying Power to continue with its colonizing activities. It is unacceptable that, under the pretext of security and public order, the Government of Israel should blatantly continue its policies and practices aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. We must remember that such measures were condemned by the Security Council in several resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). We cannot allow, by our inaction, situations such as those that occurred last July in the clashes in East Jerusalem and the West Bank to be repeated. As Council members, we cannot allow more violence that adds to the number of dead, be they Israeli or Palestinian, to take place.

Bolivia reaffirms that the lack of accountability for violations of international law committed by Israel serves to reinforce a culture of impunity, leading to a recurrence of violations and seriously endangering the maintenance of international peace, as established in Human Rights Council resolution S-21/1.

Once again, we express our commitment to the immediate and timely implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), and we again call for the next report to be circulated in advance and in writing to the members of the Council for their thorough consideration. In that context, all settlement activities being carried out by the Government of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories must cease, as well as any expansionist activities that undermine any possibility of dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis.

We vehemently reaffirm that the only long-term solution to the conflict is the two-State solution, with an Israeli State and a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State, within the pre-1967 international borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and of the General Assembly.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are no more names inscribed on my list.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.